



STATE OF WASHINGTON

PROFESSIONAL EDUCATOR STANDARDS BOARD

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Future Washington Teachers Receive Results of Basic Skills Test

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Sixty-eight percent of prospective teachers in Washington who participated in the state's first administration of a new basic skills test were successful in passing all three sections of the test.

The Washington Educator Skills Test – Basic (WEST-B) was administered for the first time on August 24th to 253 applicants to Washington teacher preparation programs. Of this first group of applicants, 88% passed the reading section, 86% passed the mathematics section, 75% passed the writing section, and 68% met the requirement of passing all three sections.

In 2000, the Legislature directed the Professional Educator Standards Board (PESB) to implement two tests for prospective teachers: a common basic skills test that higher education institutions would require for admissions to teacher preparation programs, beginning September 2002, and a content test in the subject area the candidate is seeking certification to teach, such as secondary math or English.

"All 22 of the state's teacher preparation programs have had some basic skills requirements for admission, but these requirements varied," explained Jennifer Wallace, PESB Executive Director. "The PESB was charged by the Legislature with developing a uniform way to measure the basic skills competency of those teachers beginning their preparation for the classroom."

Teachers moving into Washington to accept positions within the state are also required to pass the basic skills test beginning in September of 2002, but can teach on a temporary permit issued by the state for one year before they must pass the WEST-B.

The WEST-B measures basic skills in reading, writing, and mathematics needed by all teachers. For example, in reading, examinees may be asked to distinguish between fact and opinion in a reading selection and interpret information presented in charts, graphs, or tables. In mathematics, the examinees may be asked to solve problems using ratios and proportions and using the correct order of mathematical operations. In writing, examinees may be asked to write a persuasive essay and identify the main idea of a written passage. More information about the content of the test along with sample test questions can be found on the WEST-B website: www.west.nesinc.com.

“Washington joins 45 other states in requiring teachers to pass a basic skills test prior to certification, a requirement that reflects the general understanding that prospective teachers cannot profit from their education unless they have these skills”, said Stephen Klein, senior research scientist at RAND and a consultant to the PESB. “Teachers are role models for the kids in their class with the language they use, what they write, and the math skills they demonstrate. It’s hard to imagine that teachers without these skills can be effective.”

On September 25, the PESB adopted passing scores for WEST-B. To pass the WEST-B examinees had to answer correctly 63% of the multiple-choice questions on both the reading and mathematics sections. To pass the writing section, examinees had to get 62% of the multiple choice questions correct and get 11 of 16 points on two writing tasks. Examinees have unlimited opportunities to re-take all or subsections of the test.

Before adopting passing scores, the PESB sought the advice and recommendations of the WEST-B Technical Advisory Committee, which includes state and national experts in teacher assessment, who advise the PESB on technical issues and oversee validity and reliability of the WEST-B. The PESB also convened a panel of K-12 educators and higher education faculty, who represent the diversity of Washington’s population, to examine the WEST-B and recommend the level of performance needed to meet requirements set forth in Washington law. The Panel used a standard setting process approved by the Technical Advisory Committee to arrive at cut score recommendations through individual ratings of all of the items on the WEST-B.

There is some latitude in this requirement for applicants to teacher preparation programs: The law allows higher education institutions to make a judgment call and admit someone to a preparation program who has not passed the test. Before achieving certification in the state, however, the prospective teacher must pass the basic skills test.

Last year, the PESB contracted with the National Evaluation Systems, Inc. (NES) to assist the Board in implementing the WEST-B. The PESB and NES conducted a job analysis and convened advisory committees of Washington educators to determine what basic skills all beginning teachers in Washington should have. These skills were confirmed by a survey of educators throughout Washington. The advisory committees next met to judge the appropriateness and fairness of the questions on the WEST-B.

More information about the PESB and the prospective teacher assessment system including WEST-B sample test items, WEST-B Q & A, and the standard setting process can be found on the board’s website (www.pesb.wa.gov).

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